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ABSTRACT

Commercialism in schools is the topic of this transcribed presentation. It addresses advertisements on school buses and educational websites; schools' and districts' exclusive agreements with bottling companies to sell only their products; corporate marketing to schools; corporate presence at educational conferences; corporate sponsorship of curriculum materials; and similar commercial activities in schools. The presentation begins with a history of commercialism in schools and follows with a discussion of the difference between education and marketing. The presentation goes on to discuss details of marketing campaigns aimed at schools; the costs of corporate support for education; the obesity problem among school-aged children; and education management organizations. The presentation ends with a question-and-answer session. (WFA)

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The Commercial Assault on Children and the School Environment

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March 9, 2003

Alex Molnar

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Part One

ALEX MOLNAR: My topic today, of course, is commercialism in schools. And I want to tell you that my first ASCD convention was, if I look out at some of the people here and judge your ages accurately, before you were born, 1971. And it was about 1983 that I began to study what was to become the topic I'm talking with you about today.

And in fact, ASCD, in no small measure, is responsible for my interest in school commercialism. So, sit back, relax, and let me tell you an interesting story for about an hour and a half. At least it's interesting to me, and you can decide whether it's interesting to you as the afternoon progresses.

It was, I believe, at the ASCD convention in 1983 that I was walking through the exhibitors hall. And I had grown accustomed to attending ASCD conventions and walking through the hall of exhibitors. You know the entire scene, the canvas bags, the plastic bags, the various giveaways, all of the goodies, the overhead projectors, the booths for textbooks and office equipment and any number of educational and educationally peripheral products somehow associated with schooling.

And at that particular convention I walked past a booth and it was for McDonald's. I said, well, gee, now that's interesting. I wonder what McDonald's is doing at ASCD. So, I went back to the booth, and McDonald's had an educational catalog. And some of you will remember from your schooling days the kind of composition books that they used to use in school -- anyway, when I went to school -- with the kind of mottled cover. It's a classic-looking composition book and you write your compositions diligently in there.

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And the McDonald's catalog was designed to look like one of these traditional composition books.

And I opened it up and I leafed through it. And it turns out that McDonald's was offering free curriculum materials for teachers on things like nutrition and the environment. Now, I said to myself, of all of the places that I might go to look for supplemental materials on nutrition, where would McDonald's be on my list? One? Two? Three? Would it be on my list at all?

How about the environment? Would I go to Ronald McDonald for advice on the environment?

And I went back. I was actually teaching at that time a course called Curriculum Planning. And there was nothing in my course syllabus about McDonald's curriculum. Nothing at all. And I went back. And most of the people who took the course were either people who wanted to be principals or people who wanted to be curriculum directors or people in some way who wanted to have a larger role in shaping the curriculum of the schools than they could as teachers.

So, I went back and I asked the students in my class, who then, by and large, were mostly teachers, and I said, look at this catalog. This is a new one on me. I haven't been aware of things like that. And yet I am teaching a course called Curriculum Planning. Is this stuff in your schools? Are materials like this in your schools? Could you bring me examples of corporate-sponsored materials from your own personal experience in your classrooms and your schools?

It took me two class sessions. We met once a week. It took me two class sessions, and I had four boxes of materials like this. And I said to myself, I am missing something here. Because if this stuff is that pervasive in the schools, then a course on curriculum planning ought to be talking about these so-called supplemental educational materials. And that became what at that time was a very offbeat interest that I have pursued for the last 20 years.

I did not set out from graduate school, with a background in curriculum theory, to become the world's leading expert on the curriculum of Ronald McDonald. But there it is.

And where have we gotten to over the last 20 or so years, since I walked through the exhibit hall at that ASCD convention?

And, by the way, I attempted, because at that time I was active in ASCD governance, I attempted to have McDonald's banned from the exhibit hall. But I was never successful for two reasons. One is, the organization said, we need the money. That's kind of familiar. I'll come back to that theme. And the other was, McDonald's has a right to free speech. Which is a kind of curious thing for a convention of professional people, choosing to allow or not allow exhibitors to be in their exhibit hall. But, in any case,

based on those two arguments, I was never successful in having McDonald's banned from the ASCD exhibit hall.

I haven't visited this year, so I don't know if they are still there.

But over the last 20 years, it is not just McDonald's that has a curriculum. The Pork Board has a curriculum. The Plastic Bag Association has a curriculum. The Dairy Council has a curriculum. The timber industry has a curriculum. The oil industry has a curriculum. This is the curriculum as a kind of souk into which you wander, and anybody who has the money to pay for admission gets to set up a booth.

We have ads on the side of school buses. We have exclusive agreements with bottling companies to sell only their products. And I will come back to that at some length in a little bit. We have advertising-laced Web portals and we have answering services at schools that provide a chirpy, friendly little reminder of who the corporate sponsor is and who is providing you access to your child's homework record.

We have all of those. Marketing in schools, to paraphrase the ad for Virginia Slims -- some of you are old enough to remember that -- you've come a long way, baby. Advertising in schools is now extraordinarily pervasive, and it touches almost every aspect of school life, and not in a good way. It has a very clear and direct impact on our ability to provide a high-quality educational program for the students we are allegedly serving.

So, how did we get here? How did we get from McDonald's in the exhibit hall, with that cute, mottled composition book catalog that they were handing out to 2003, to this wave of marketing in the schools, where you have principals and superintendents patting themselves on the back because they signed an exclusive agreement with a soft drink bottler, actually being proud of that? How did we get here?

Well, marketing in schools is nothing new. As I've researched this, the earliest example of attempting to market to children in schools was a hardware store in the late 1890's. It was trying to put peripheral materials in schools with their marketing slogan on it.

The problem was perceived to be pervasive enough so that, in 1919, the National Education Association actually empanelled a committee, called the Committee on Propaganda in the Schools. It was called propaganda then, by the way, not supplemental learning materials. Which is, in itself, a kind of interesting rhetorical transformation between 1919 and the 1950's, when propaganda became supplemental learning materials, as described in publications of the American Association of School Administrators and ASCD, which put out brochures and guidelines on the subject.

In the 1980's, you may remember, we were "a nation at risk." That was the title of perhaps one of the most widely quoted, most influential, most wrongheaded, reports in the history of modern public education. It was a wonderful example of data-free policy advocacy. But, nevertheless, it was, by and large, a proposal for the kind of reforms that

the education establishment, for want of a better word, really supported. It wasn't a corporate report. Ronald Reagan disliked it so much that he almost didn't turn up in the Rose Garden when Terrell Bell, his Secretary of Education, released it. He felt it was tainted by the point of view represented by the education establishment.

It wasn't long before you would have believed that "*A Nation at Risk*" wasn't the voice of the education establishment, it was the voice of corporate America, because they embraced it, particularly its assertion that it was massive American public school failure that created the economic crises of the late-seventies and early-eighties. They embraced that. And they signed on to a whole slew of corporate education reforms.

This is the era in which school-business partnerships took off like a rocket. Now it seems conventional wisdom, right, that there will be school-business partnerships. Any time a school touches a corporation in some way, it is a partnership. Well, in the 1980's, "*A Nation at Risk*" is what created this corporate public school embrace. It helped define the context for this engagement.

At the same time, of course, the corporations were supporting the ideology behind "*A Nation at Risk*" and demanding that schools improve, they were also demanding a whole host of economic development strategies which had the effect of knocking the pins out from public funding for public schools. Economic development strategies, like tax incremental financing, industrial revenue bonding, equipment and inventory tax exemptions, and so on, all had the effect of transferring the tax liability, to a very large extent, from corporations to individual homeowners. And with the predictable consequence that, by the mid- and late-eighties and early-nineties, there were tax limitations measures on the ballot in many States, as homeowners found that they were literally sometimes, particularly fixed-income senior citizens and blue-collar workers, who saw their income declining throughout the eighties and into the nineties, that they literally had a choice to pay their ever-escalating public school tax bills or cap the amount of money. The only way they could give themselves a raise was to lower their taxes.

So, on the one hand, you have the explosion of school-business partnerships; on the other hand, you have the embrace of economic development strategies, which have the effect of constricting the resources available for public education.

So, now we arrive at the nineties. And in the nineties, democracy triumphed. Now, this ought to be good news for public education. Because those of you that are even casual students of American history realize that public education in this country was here at the birth of this country. It was very much on the minds of our Founding Fathers. It was much discussed during the Revolutionary War period. Education in the United States has a fundamentally different foundation than education in Europe or anywhere else in the world.

Bear in mind that the world that our Founding Fathers looked out upon was a world in which every other nation on earth was not a democracy, where a great number of nations were much more powerful economically and militarily than the United States. That being

the case, the bulwark of republican governance and democratic values was understood to be a well-educated population.

You see, in Europe, with its inherited nobility and privilege, education was seen as a threat to the social order. People were to learn only what they needed to learn in order to accomplish the tasks to which they had been assigned by their status in life.

In the United States, by contrast, education was seen as a pillar of the social order, a democratic order that couldn't survive an ignorant citizenry. So, public education has been and is political from the top to the bottom. And we forget that at our own peril, I think.

So, we have democracy triumphing in the nineties, the collapse of the Soviet Union. And it seems fair to ask, if democracy triumphed, then why is the preeminent democratic institution of our society, public education, under relentless assault and chronically underfunded? How is it possible to explain the triumph of the ideal upon which public education has been built and the assault on the institution of public education itself?

Let me suggest to you that what has happened is not the triumph of democracy so much as the triumph of an idea called the market and the translation of the idea of a citizen into the idea of a consumer. This is important because it stretches right through the whole discussion of commercialism in schools. From the most trivial-looking supplemental educational material produced by a corporation to sell one of its products, Gusher's fruit snacks, potato chips, Mars bars, Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, it shoots right through that to much more sophisticated developments such as the transformation of schooling itself into a product to be bought and sold.

We are much more likely to talk about our constituents in public education as consumers than as citizens. And that, in my mind at least, is a telling transformation. Because, you see, the market doesn't care and is not set up to do something that public schools, as democratic institutions, must do. And that is to attend to the idea of equity and justice for all. The market doesn't care.

The market is prepared to sell you a tenement or a palace. It is prepared to sell you a Mercedes or a Yugo. It is prepared to sell you a Taco Bell burrito or it's prepared to sell you an exquisite meal at a French restaurant. You just have to have the money. It doesn't care about justice. And it most certainly doesn't care how you got the money.

Now, we have a couple of questions to ask ourselves about this entity, this thing that dominates our lives, called the market. It's called a free market, isn't it? It's called a free market.

Question number one, just as a kind of mental experiment: Is the market a human or a divine conception? And I mean that quite seriously. Because when you hear conversations among mainstream economists these days, what they caution against is interference with the market, as if they were talking about divine will.

So, we have a question to ask ourselves: Is the market a religious concept? Is it a religious idea, handed down on an economic tablet to Alan Greenspan when he came down from the Fed with the clay tablets? Or is the market a human institution, created by people like you and me, with mixtures of self-interest, general interest, no interest at all, over time?

If the market is divine, there is nothing to be done except to allow it to operate, to stand back and watch it work. To wash our hands of the good and the bad that it does, because it is divinely inspired.

If the market is a human creation, then we are responsible for it, its shape, its dimension, its functioning. It's important to know this, just as it is important to know whether the parents of the children who attend your schools are citizens or consumers.

Now, in the late 19th century, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations, under our Constitution, were persons. They were legally persons. So, does that mean when Enron dies, it goes to heaven? Is that what it means?

They're constitutionally a person, but, if you believe in such a thing, do they have a soul? Can we make a distinction between a corporation and a corporate entity and us? Because if we can't, then the market must be divine. The market must be divine, and, of course, corporate executives aren't really like the rest of us mortals at all because they're priests. They're priests who tell us how to worship at the altar of free enterprise.

This is an important distinction to keep in mind. Markets operate on the basis of contracts. Did you know that every time that you buy a toothbrush, an automobile, a car, a trip to the Bahamas, you've entered into a contract? And when economists talk about liberty and freedom, they're talking about that within a context of contracts, contracted relationships?

What are the assumptions behind a contract? The assumptions are these: That the people who enter into the contract have equal knowledge. They have equal knowledge. That they have equal power. And that all of the parties who choose to enter into the contract are free to choose or not to choose to do so.

Now, then, in schools -- or out of schools for that matter -- can you tell me whether or not those three assumptions can be validly applied to children? I think not.

And I get very impatient, and you've heard it. You've heard people say that marketing to children really doesn't matter that much because they're so darned savvy. Boy, these kids really know. They are so smart. They are able to tell when something is an ad, when something is not an ad, when they are being manipulated, when they are not being manipulated.

Now, if you really believed that and you really followed the logic of that position, then why shouldn't children be able to drink, drive, vote, and fornicate like rabbits whenever

they want, if they are so darned savvy, if they are so darned savvy, just like adults, they're unaffected by advertising? And, by the way, when marketers do polls and they ask people, are you affected by advertising, about 80 percent say no. They freely choose to drink the same soft drink. Millions of individual decisions.

They freely choose to eat the same brand of tortilla chips. They freely, and by some mystical process known only to themselves, arrive at the conclusion that they will croak if they don't wear Nikes. Because marketing has no role to play.

Now, it is bad enough that you and I, as free-thinking adults, are bombarded with commercials. I think you probably don't even know how many. It's so much a part of our lives that you probably couldn't even count easily how many advertising messages you have seen today on the side of buses, your taxicabs, coming into this center, in your hotel, on television, in the newspapers, on the radio, in magazines. You probably couldn't even tell how many ads that you've seen. It is just the curriculum of our culture, there it is.

But think about this. If advertising is the curriculum of our culture, and we think about it as people concerned about the issue of curriculum, then what are the goals and objectives of advertising? What is it that we are being taught by advertising?

Well, what we are being taught is to be dissatisfied. To be dissatisfied with the way our breath smells, the way our face looks, the way our body looks, the kind of clothes we wear, the kind of car we drive, the kind of food we eat, the kind of home we live in, the kind of place where we vacation. To be dissatisfied with the way we relate to our children, dissatisfied that we haven't got the right brand of pop tarts, dissatisfied perpetually, unendingly dissatisfied with an itch that only consumption can cure.

Now, in the 19th century, consumption was a disease. We've come a long way. We've come a long way, and it's hard to talk about this in any group inside of a culture where shopping is one of the main leisure time activities. Think about a culture in which most people who go to a shopping mall don't go there to purchase anything in particular. They just go to consume something, anything, whatever strikes their fancy. But they have no time to participate in democratic, civic activities. But they have no time.

And, by the way, they might not have any time anyway because they're so deeply in debt. So, what are we teaching our children when we give marketer and the marketing mentality access to our children? We are teaching them to be chronically dissatisfied with themselves, to see the solution to life's problems as consuming of objects and materials, and we are telling them that they should have it right now. We are telling them, go into debt to have it, because you deserve it. Go into to debt.

If ever there was a definition of a wage slave, it is an American middle-class family with three charge cards maxed to the limit. No wonder they don't want to pay taxes for schools; they're busy paying 18 percent on credit card interest, interest that pays no dividend to their community, provides no return to their well-being. It is gone, gone to people elsewhere with other interests, for other purposes. It is gone.

So, we live in a culture that would rather pay 18 percent, 24 percent interest on charge cards than pay increased taxes for public schools. How did we come to this?

It is important to ask yourself, why are marketers so interested in children in school? Because, on its face, this logic is insane. It's socially destructive. It's personally destructive. Somebody somewhere has to learn that it all makes sense, that it's just the way things are. Why are marketers interested in children in schools?

Well, in my mind, when you take a culture and some of the best minds in that culture and you spend billions and billions of dollars figuring out how to exploit people, it borders on abuse. Doesn't it? Think about this. University-educated Ph.D. psychologists being paid enormous amounts of money, millions of dollars spent on 30-second commercials directed at eight-year-olds. Is that a form of abuse or is it not?

I think it is. I think it is rank child abuse. And I'm not even talking about the more florid examples.

Have you seen the ads for children's clothing, the way in which younger and younger girls and boys are being posed to sell clothing? What the hell is that about? What is that about?

It damn near looks pornographic. And it's time that somebody said so. And maybe the people saying so should be in some way in public education.

Should we remain silent while this is being done to the children that we serve? Or, more to the point, should we allow this kind of madness in our schools?

What's the difference between marketing and education? Is there a difference between marketing and education? Is there a difference between marketing and education? It's a fair enough question, isn't it?

Well, if you go back and you look at the history of American marketing, you're going to find two men that stand out. One is Ivy Ledbetter Lee. He was hired by the Rockefellers, after the massacre of mining families in Ludlow, Colorado, to turn a person who had been described and largely vilified as a corporate tyrant -- that is, John D. Rockefeller -- into a figure of public probity, a model figure. He taught John D. Rockefeller to give dimes when he encountered them on the street, as a sign of his beloved beneficence, among other things. And successfully transformed the Rockefeller image from crass exploiters of the mass of American people into beloved and philanthropic figures.

He is important, but more important still is a man called Edward Bernays. I want to spend just a few minutes talking about Edward Bernays. You may not have heard of him. He's a nephew of Sigmund Freud. He was mobilized during the First World War for the Committee on Public Information, which was the propaganda effort on the part of the Wilson administration to sell the First World War to the American citizens that didn't want it. Does that sound familiar? Am I the only one who thinks that sounds familiar?

When he was demobilized, he single-handedly, really, invented the American public relations industry. He lived into quite an old age. A very interesting interview Bill Moyers did with him in a series of programs called "A March Through the 20th Century." I recommend it to you. It's a fascinating interview.

Let me tell you a couple of things about Edward Bernays, a dapper-looking old man being interviewed. His question that he posed for himself is: How do you control people in a mass democracy? How do you control people when you don't use troops? It's as simple as that. And you know who the people are. It's you all.

So, how do you control people like you when you don't use troops? And his answer was: By propaganda.

Now, I'm not making this up. I'm not using inflammatory language. I'm using the language that he used and the questions that he posed. I'm not putting words in his mouth. He was a very prolific writer. You can find his writing in books like *Manufacturing Consent*.

In the twenties and thirties, he was a very prolific writer. The question was: How do you control people without using guns?

He did a couple of, I think, very interesting advertising campaigns. In the 1920's, the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company had a problem. You know what the problem was? The problem was is they were selling a lot of cigarettes and making a lot of money, but growth was flat. You know why growth was flat? Because they couldn't get women to smoke. It was socially inappropriate at that time for women to smoke in public, so how do you market to women when it's socially inappropriate for women to smoke? It would certainly point you out as worthy of scorn.

This was a problem. You have a big potential market -- women, but you have a social prohibition against women smoking. How do you overcome that?

Well, they hired Edward Bernays to figure out how to overcome that. And here's what he came up with. By the way, for those of you that may not be familiar, in the 1920's, this was a time of enormous progress by feminists. It was a time of considerable ferment and conflict over women's roles in American society. In many respects in that regard, the twenties looked a little bit like the sixties and seventies.

And he got debutantes to walk with their bows in the Easter parade down Fifth Avenue in New York openly smoking. And the cigarettes they were smoking, he fashioned as torches of liberty. Torches of liberty. And so he made the connection between women's independence and women's liberation and the ability of women to smoke in public. It was a remarkably successful marketing campaign. And those of you who have looked at the statistics on the heart attack rate among women smokers will have some idea of how very successful that marketing campaign has been after all these years.

Part Two

ALEX MOLNAR: Let me tell you another marketing campaign. General Electric had a problem, because light bulb sales were flat. I mean, light bulbs are a hard item to get really sexed up, wouldn't you say? And not only that, what do you say once a person has a light bulb in every socket? Get sockets with more sockets? More light bulbs? It's really hard. It's a mature industry. There are only so many light bulbs you can sell.

Then, how do you get market share? If you're General Electric, you want more light bulbs, but you want market share.

Well, here is the advertising campaign he created for them, though it wasn't publicly acknowledged that it was an advertising campaign. He created a festival called "Light's Golden Jubilee," to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Thomas Alva Edison's invention of the light bulb. He got the President of the United States involved. It became an international event. Nobody really realized except for a handful of people that this was, in effect, an advertising campaign.

And when Bill Moyers interviewed him about this, he sad back and he said that it was a wonderful campaign. Think about it, light, who could be against light? Golden: money, success. Jubilee: a celebration, happiness, a wonderful thing. And he described what he had as rhetorical hegemony. Who could oppose something called "Light's Golden Jubilee"?

This is one of the reasons, if you come down to it, why, for example, a word like "privatization" is now outside and verboten in the political discussion. People don't like it. People don't like the word "vouchers." They prefer "choice." These are marketing techniques that are very, very, at this point, well established, and they are efforts to create what Bernays called rhetorical hegemony.

So, what we have is the triumph of the market and, within the market, the triumph of marketing. Those of you who have tried to call technical support for the companies that tell you they're there for you 24/7 realize that there is a long distance between the marketing campaign and the reality of that corporation. A long, long distance.

So, what is the difference between Edward Bernays, somebody you probably don't know, and John Dewey, somebody that you may have heard about in passing? What's the difference between Edward Bernays and John Dewey? Well, it's the difference between a consumer and a citizen, which I have already mentioned.

For Dewey, schools were about citizenship. They were about extending, strengthening, clarifying our democracy. For Bernays, marketing is about propaganda and control.

Marketing, Bernays', is about presenting the illusion of participation. Dewey is about the reality of participation. What do I mean, "the allusion"? David Riesman, in the 1950's, wrote a book called *The Lonely Crowd.* And what he talked about was people who felt

chronically empty, even though they were around other people a lot. Have you ever encountered this in your own life or among your students, a lonely crowd?

Well, consider the fact that there is a difference between a real human connection and a collection of people united primarily by the fact that they drink the same soft drinks, wear the same sneakers, and go to the same fast-food restaurants. These are false communities of consumers. They have no social reality. No wonder people feel empty.

So, in our schools we have seen, over the past century, marketing move from marketing to schools for things like desks and chalk and computers and overhead projectors and things like that to marketing in schools products, services and so on. And now we have, at its furthest extension, we have the marketing of schools itself. Has anybody here heard about the Edison Schools Corporation? About Advantage Learning? About Mosaica? The marketing of schools themselves, schooling itself is a product.

I have been tracking for the last five years all kinds of different marketing activities in schools. Let me just run through them pretty quickly for you and tell you about them.

How many of you in here have heard of something called Coke and Education Day? Would you raise your hand if you've heard of Coke and Education Day.

[A show of hands]

ALEX MOLNAR: It looks like three people have heard about Coke and Education Day.

Let me tell you one of the ways that corporations are involved in schools. They sponsor events and activities. Do you know what Coke and Education Day was? About three years ago, the Coca-Cola Corporation, as part of its largest marketing campaign to that date, was producing a discount card to be used by adolescents, in which they would get discounts at selected vendors. As part of the marketing campaign for this discount card, they had a contest. So, what was the contest?

The contest was that schools should get students to write marketing plans for this discount card. And they should send those marketing plans in to Coca-Cola. And Coca-Cola would judge these marketing plans and determine which one was the best marketing plan. And the winning school would get $10,000.

Now, $10,000, in the largest marketing campaign that Coca-Cola had done to that date. Hundreds of millions of dollars, but they were offering the winning school $10,000 -- nationwide. Now, local bottlers, they could have their own sort of sponsorship, and they offered $500.

Coke and Education Day came to public attention because, at Greenbriar High School in Evans, Georgia, they had a terrific, they thought, plan to have something called Coke and Education Day. And here is what they did, among other things. They had their entire student body come out into the parking lot. They invited Coca-Cola executives, by the

way, from the local bottler and from the national headquarters in Atlanta. They had their entire student body come out into the school parking, and they had the student body form itself into the word "Coke."

Freshmen, I believe, were C. Sophomores were O. Juniors were K. Seniors were E. They had a cherry-picker crane with a photographer to capture this wondrous sights of all of the students at Greenbriar High School, spelling out the word "Coke" for the, I'm sure, beaming Coca-Cola executives, because administrators that dumb are really hard to find. Oh, you can find them easier than I would like, but there they were, the beaming executives, and at that moment, when the photographer was taking pictures, a student revealed a Pepsi-Cola t-shirt.

Oh, the uproar. The student was suspended by the principal on the grounds that, among other things, he might have cost the school some money, created a bad impression, and a whole other series of reasons that I find, and still find, incomprehensible. The student was suspended. It made national headlines. The principal was backed up by the superintendent -- I almost said "stupid-intendent." And they were incensed that this made national news and that the kid appeared on national TV.

And of course, in the course of this, people found out that that day students were learning to cook with Coca-Cola. Students were doing science experiments with Coca-Cola. An entire bizarro world was revealed here.

But my question to you as educators, as curriculum specialists, is: In all of this talk of world-class standards, corporate partnerships, the need to set and keep a rigorous academic curriculum, where does Coke and Education Day fit in? How much did it cost the taxpayers in Georgia to have their staff paid while their students were paraded out into the parking lot? How much did it cost them? How much learning time was lost while the administrators willingly played corporate shills?

Coke and Education Day is an example of one kind of corporate intrusion the schools -- sponsorship of programs and activities. Of course, everybody is doing it.

How about incentive programs? There is another kind. I love incentive programs. Incentive programs, dare I say it, "Book It" is an incentive program. Is anybody unfamiliar with the ubiquitous Pizza Hut Book It program, in which we reveal that, as educators, after 200 years of thinking about curriculum, instructional design, motivational techniques, and so on, that the best thing that we can think of to encourage children to read is to offer them a coupon for a free personal pan pizza?

How pathetic and embarrassing can it possibly get? If we're not blushing over this, we certainly should be. And Book It was singled out by President Reagan as a terrific example of corporate-school cooperation, an assertion that I think a lot of principals, superintendents and teachers actually agree with. Because no one has bothered to talk through what it actually means in terms of pedagogy to take the position, implicitly or

explicitly, that melted cheese has a greater impact on children than you do. Shame on us all. Shame on us all for having programs like that in our schools. It's pathetic.

How about the space that our schools represent? It costs a lot of money. Those of you who have tried unsuccessfully to build schools and bond issues in communities realize that the amount of money that it costs to build facilities is something that is tightly contested in most American communities. You don't get bond issues passed easily in many communities in the United States, perhaps most communities in the United States. Why not?

Well, then, answer me this. If they cost so darn much money, why would you turn over the use of this space and these facilities so easily to corporations? I got an angry letter from a school board member in Illinois because I was quoted in the Chicago Tribune criticizing that school board for giving naming rights to the Rustoleum Corporation. And the school board member said, but Rustoleum gave us $100,000.

And I said, yes, Rustoleum gave you $100,000 to put their name on the side of the gym in perpetuity, to write off that expense as a marketing expense or a charitable contribution, depending on what their corporate auditors told them was the least expensive thing for them to do, to have their name in front of the community forever. Consider that against the cost of just renting a billboard. And furthermore, since the gym cost several millions of dollars, why wouldn't you call it Taxpayers' Gym? Why wouldn't you name it after a person in your community who was honorable and noble and who made a difference?

We used to do that. We used to name schools after civic heroes. Now we sell the names of schools to corporations. That's appropriation of space. We sell the names of schools. We sell rooftops. We sell the sides of buses. We sell our corridor walls. We saw anything and everything that isn't otherwise covered to corporations.

I got into a discussion once on an NPR broadcast called "Talk of the Nation." The subject was naming rights for football and baseball stadiums. We had at that time in Milwaukee just agreed to make Bud Selig the Commissioner of Baseball, perhaps the country's largest welfare recipient. That is, over the objections of the people in repeated referenda. The State of Wisconsin agreed to levy taxes, upwards of three-quarters of a billion dollars, to build a stadium.

Now, wouldn't you call that Taxpayers' Park, People's Park? Three-quarters of a billion dollars. But it's not called that. It's called Miller's Park, because the local brewery bought naming rights for a couple of million bucks.

So, the gain versus the loss, the win versus the investment, is way out of proportion in these deals. And even if they made good economic sense, do you really want to be promoting a special interest in schools?

How about electronic marketing? Many of you have access to the Internet. Many of you have computers. Many of you have a whole array of new technology. And some of you

have heavily laden portals or access through portals or real-time, click-on ads on computer screens, or screen savers that advertise products or mousepads that advertise products or peripherals that advertise products. You have a whole host of electronic marketing techniques.

Channel 1 is now ancient history, isn't it? It's a mature enterprise. It's in 12,000 or so schools. It isn't growing. It isn't shrinking. But in those schools kids are watching 12 minutes, they're watching two minutes of advertising every day, by contract, it's required. Why?

What about sponsorship of curriculum materials? How many of you have ever eaten a Gusher's fruit snack? Would you raise your hands.

[A show of hands]

ALEX MOLNAR: How many of you really enjoyed the experience?

[A show of hands]

ALEX MOLNAR: I don't see a lot of hands there.

How many of you, when you ate Gusher's fruit snacks, said to yourself, you know, this reminds me of an exploding geothermic phenomenon? Did anybody, when they had their Gusher's fruit snack, think that?

[No response]

ALEX MOLNAR: Oh, you didn't. Well, let me tell you, that General Mills, which is the manufacturer of Gusher's, sent to schools in this country a bit of free curriculum material, called "Gusher's Wonders of the World," in which Gusher's fruit snacks were linked and likened to exploding geothermic phenomenon. This was a science lesson, you see. And in one of the suggested activities, teachers were asked to have students take the sample -- because they sent samples -- and put it in their mouths, bite down on it, and think about how that reminded them of exploding geothermic phenomenon.

Now, this reminded me a little bit of my son, Kevin, who one weekend had an assignment, for some reason known only to his teacher and to himself, to write about eagles. It seemed straightforward enough. And so when we noticed that Kevin hadn't really been doing much with his books that weekend, we said, time is running short and you've got a paper due on eagles, don't you think you better get to it? Don't you think the time is running out? And he said, don't worry. It's not really a problem. We said, it's not? Don't you have to get some resource materials? Don't you have to figure it out?

He said, no. This is really very easy. I just sit down and I think about eagles. And then I write the paper. Completely devoid of any content. Kevin just thought about eagles. And so the manufacturers of Gusher's would have you think about exploding geothermal

phenomenon. Couldn't you just see those kids sitting there, imaging Old Faithful, because they had their teeth around a Gusher's? Fantastic.

Now, let's come to fundraising. How many of you have fundraising events at your school?

[A show of hands]

ALEX MOLNAR: How many of you are ever not involved in fundraising? It gets pretty relentless, doesn't it?

Do you know that most fundraising in this country tries to sell people things that are bad for them? Most fundraising in this country encourages people to eat things and drink things that are bad for them. So, we educate our young by encouraging them to engage in behaviors that are harmful to their health.

I see a problem with this. But it's very pervasive. It is very pervasive. We have become a super-sized culture. Do you remember when you could hold a soft drink in one hand? Do you remember those days when you could hold a soft drink in one hand, those days before the Big Gulp? It's a kind of race going on now, wouldn't you say? It's kind of a race between the size of the soft drinks that you can buy and the ability of car manufacturers to make large enough cupholders. It's kind of like now the oil drum-sized Coke, isn't it? It's the new 20-gallon Coke, for 10 cents more than the 10-gallon Coke, for 5 cents more than the 5-gallon Coke. And you're really a little weenie, we will sell you this little tiny for 2 cents less.

So, what's it going to be? Are you going to be a little weenie and just get 16 ounces of Coke, or are you going to be a real American, you're going to super-size it, and you're going to recognize a value meal for what it is? We call this one our whole-hog value meal. You get the whole damn pig. You get six months of cheese production from Wisconsin. You get 40 farm-fresh eggs. You get this on a sesame bun, slathered with our mystery sauce. You get 35 pounds of Idaho potato french fries, fried in beef suet, and you get yourself a whole garbage can full of soda.

Can you pass that up? And when you look at the health statistics from the United States, the answer is no.

When you see people waddling off to sit down in front of some action flick, with their arms around a jumbo -- the only size that's refillable -- popcorn, and you see their poor, fat, little children -- because American children are among the most obese on the planet -- and they all go off down and try to wedge themselves into the seats, and snort down this jumbo-sized food so they can get a refill, what's next? Just slop it in the troughs with a pail. It's the American way.

Hell, it doesn't have to taste good, but there sure is a lot of this crap.

So, we have a real problem with consumption in this country. But the question is: That being the case, why would we let Ronald McDonald step one big floppy foot inside of the schoolhouse? Why would we let Pepsi and Coke in there? Why would we let Snickers and Mars bars in there? Why would we do that, if we gave it any thought at all?

Now, let me talk to you about exclusive agreements, because it has been getting a lot of play lately, exclusive agreements. And it is kind of a shabby story, in a way. It doesn't really make the education profession look good, particularly the administrative end of the education profession, of which there may be one or two in this audience.

Just a couple of quick pieces of information for you. The percent of children drinking soft drinks in the United States -- this is something that the Agriculture Department considers a food of little or no nutritional value; in other words, empty calories that displace other foods because they fill you up without filling you out, maybe; or maybe they fill you out without giving you any benefit -- 83 percent of boys 14 years old have soft drinks every single day. Seventy-eight percent of girls 14 years old have soft drinks every single day.

Soft drinks now constitute 11 percent of all of the calories consumed by adolescents. Eleven percent of the calories of adolescents come from soft drinks. That is, by the way, 15 teaspoons of sugar.

Soft drinks, by far, outpace the consumption of juice and milk. Even in America there is a limit to how far you can distend your belly. In other words, if you drink 32 ounces of soft drinks a day, you don't have as much room for milk, water and juice. There is a problem just with regard to the physical capacity to take in more.

Now, let me read you this just in order. I went through and culled what I thought would be some interesting information about this. And I'm spending more time on exclusive agreements because I think it's useful to illustrate all of the other things I've been talking about. Because the problem is so clear and the danger is so present.

So, here is something from the Harvard School of Public Health, just a headline: "Active girls who drink colas are five times more likely to fracture bones."

Five times more likely to fracture bones, active girls. This is again from Harvard. Increased consumption of soda promotes childhood obesity.

By the way, you will find the same thing on the Centers for Disease Control Web site. This is really fairly uncontroversial information, except in certain benighted circles like the California Association of School Administrators, the Vermont Association of Schools Administrators, the Maryland Association of School Administrators, and other friends and allies of the soft drink industry on that time-honored belief that we need the money.

I have an article here that's called "Fat of the Land." It's from a magazine called *Eating Well*. And it's an article by a woman who has just finished a book called *Food Politics*, Marion Nestle. And I do recommend that book for those of you who might be interested

in it. And she talks about just the portion size, something that I was talking about earlier with regard primarily to soft drinks.

How about french fries? Between 1950 to 1970, the serving size of french fries was 2 ounces, and that represented 200 calories. In the 1980's, the serving size of french fries was 4 ounces, and that represented 400 calories. In 2002, the serving size of french fries is 6.1 ounces, and that represents 610 calories. Now, you don't have to be much of a mathematician to figure out that 610 calories from french fries is a whopping contribution to a 2,000-calorie diet. And when you put it together with the fact that the vegetable that most Americans eat is potatoes in the form of french fries and potato chips. And this doesn't even take in potato chips, which are a great snack to go with soft drinks, don't you think? That kind of salty and sweet combination, ain't it wonderful?

Then of course, we have an article here from the RAND Corporation, "Health Risks of Obesity: Worse than smoking, drinking or poverty." It takes a hell of a lot to be a higher indicator of bad health than smoking, drinking and poverty.

Then here is an article from the *New York Times*, "Eat Your Vegetables? Only at a Few Schools." Paragraph number three in this article: "A school lunch often looks like an exercise in fat-loading, with a super-sized soft drink from a vending machine, followed by a candy bar from another machine. The meal is more in keeping with one from a fast-food outlet than what the Department of Agriculture says is a nutritious meal."

Here is one from the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "Obesity is a threat to U.S. security. The Surgeon General urges a cultural shift."

So, what are we to learn next, that Osama bin Laden is behind this super-sizing craze? That the threat to the United States is really from a group of people so damn fat that they can't defend themselves?

A fact sheet from the Centers for Disease Control: Foods and beverages sold outside of the school lunch program, basically, it amounts to this. The most often-sold product in schools are unhealthy. The least-often sold products in schools are the most healthy. There is an inverse relationship between the healthiness of the product and your ability to get it in schools.

Shame on us. My goodness.

Now, this from the USDA. A memo cites the USDA regulations, apparently widely ignored. The USDA has regulations on what can be sold to children in schools. The U.S. Department of Agriculture notes that these regulations are widely ignored in schools.

Eighty-four percent of schools sell things like soft drinks, candy and other products to raise funds. Most of the schools that have exclusive soft drink agreements also have incentive clauses. Did you know that? Do you know what an incentive clause is? The more soft drinks your kids consume, the more money you get.

So, kids are sort of drinking themselves into ill health to raise money for what? What are they raising money for? You're contradicting your curriculum.

Let me make one other point about this. And that is your curriculum. I think the title of this convention is "Igniting the Fires of Learning." Is it something like that? "Igniting the Passion for Learning." It doesn't say turning up the heat in the deep fryer for learning. Turning up learning's deep fryer. Super-size learning. Learning as a Slurpee.

What I want to say is if your school has a nutrition curriculum -- and I am naive enough to believe that ultimately the purpose of schools is their curriculum -- what are schools about if it isn't what they teach? I can't come up with an answer other than that. Schools are what they teach, just as we are what we eat.

So, you have a nutrition curriculum that, on the one hand, tells children to eat a healthful diet. And what is a healthful diet? A healthful diet is low in fat, low in salt, low in sugar. It has lots of whole grains, relatively little meat, lots of complex carbohydrates, good protein. It's basically the diet that most of our parents told us we should eat. It's pretty much that.

How then could we ever, if the school itself is about the curriculum -- I'm making an assumption; maybe you don't agree with this assumption, but my assumption is the school is about the curriculum -- how could a school board or a superintendent or a principal or a teacher defend, implicitly or explicitly, promoting products that directly undermine their own curriculum message on the grounds that they need the money to improve their school programs?

How on earth could a sentient being, as they say in Star Trek, do that?

Now, the down and dirty answer to that, the superficial answer to that, is the one that many administrators are now giving when they are, in effect, being publicly shamed for entering into exclusive agreements with bottling companies. The answer is, well, gee whiz, you told us to be more like businesspeople, you told us to be entrepreneurial. You haven't funded us adequately for years and years. And so we went out to get money wherever we could. I guess we can only thank God that some enterprising principal didn't hit upon cocaine as a way of raising money.

Think of it. Where do you draw the line? Is there anything that you won't do to raise money? And isn't it better to say to a community, we have to eliminate this program, than to try and support it with funds that undermine the very children that you're allegedly serving?

Well, states are now considering limits. Minnesota, Vermont, Maryland, these are all examples of States that are considering limits. There are about 16 altogether. In San Francisco, they have banned soft drinks and junk food from the cafeteria but not from the schools. In Los Angeles, they banned it altogether, soft drinks. And in Seattle, they have

said no more soft drink advertising. But, unfortunately, the school district -- and this happens in many places -- they have rules, but they are not observed.

So, a group of parents in Seattle recently got so frustrated by the school board's lack of follow-through on its own rules and regulations that they went and put school administrators under citizen's arrest for refusing to follow the school board's own guideline. They want and staged a media event and placed school administrators under a kind of mock citizen's arrest just to get them to obey the district's own policy.

And then we have this from the State of New York. Do you know what this is? This is a legal filing in a court case in the State of New York. This is what I believe the future probably should be. It's a very interesting country we live in. Exclusive soft drink contracts in the State of New York are being challenged by whom? By the American Quality Beverages Association.

This is a beautiful thing. You could never invent America. You could never invent it. It's an endlessly inventive country. It never fails to surprise and entertain.

Part Three

ALEX MOLNAR: The American Quality Beverages Association is going to court. They are taking the Commissioner of Education in New York to court over exclusive soft drinks. And what is the basis of their case? Let me just read to you from their press release:

The petitioners allege that the Commissioner's determination -- and his determination was that schools could enter into these exclusive soft drink agreements -- is contradictory to the education law governing the after school hours use of school property, the New York State Constitution, which prohibits public property being used to benefit a private corporation -- it's a real issue -- the State law that governs competitive bidding of public contracts, and the regulation prohibiting commercialism on school property.

I think that they have a valid case on every single one of those grounds, every single one of those grounds. And that brings us really back to the starting point of the conversation. And that is the idea that schools are a political institution serving a public purpose, rather than a market-based institution serving private interests, a collection of consumers who buy an educational product in the free marketplace of public education.

Very, very different conceptions, because what they're, in essence, in this case doing is they are throwing our own values as educators right into our face and saying, you are frauds. You are frauds. The Constitution says that you can't use public property to advantage a private corporation. You can't do that.

The State regulations say there shouldn't be commercialism on public property. But you're doing it. And there is the little matter of just good business practices and competitive bidding.

So, in essence, you have a trade association filing a lawsuit for its own self-interest. I mean, let's not make anybody here into some kind of a false idol; they're doing this because they want to do business in the schools. This is not about idealism. But the fact of the matter is they have thrown our ideals as educators right in our face and said, you are frauds and you're defending your fraudulent behavior. Shame on you.

And it is quite a commentary when a self-interested entity like something called the American Quality Beverages Association has to remind us of what our values are as educators.

So, exclusive agreements really do represent, in my view, kind of a lightning bolt that illuminates the night sky with regard to the problems of marketing to kids in schools. Adult Type II diabetes is now a childhood disease. It's no longer an adult disease.

What are the public health costs of that? What is the human toll in that? It's uniminagineable.

The last area of commercialism that I study is an area which you're probably well familiar with. And that is privatization. Privatization represents that progression, from marketing to schools, to marketing in schools, to the marketing of schools. It is an attempt to bring to public education the HMO model of health care. And I'm not saying this as a kind of flamboyant, inflammatory statement. I'm simply citing to you the way the industry styles itself.

For-profit education firms style themselves as education management organizations, EMO's. And if you want to know how they describe themselves, how they describe themselves to investors and so on, stock analyst reports are very, very easy to look at. To a large extent, the charter school reform is now about for-profit education. It is now about for-profit education. A considerable number of the nation's charter schools are now run by for-profit corporations, who use charter school legislation as a way to do business, where they otherwise might not be able to.

Some States have in their charter school laws prohibitions against private organizations, for-profit organizations, running charter schools, but those are relatively easy to circumvent. Because what happens is that a nominal nonprofit organization gets the charter and then contracts with the for-profit management company to actually establish and run the school. So, that's the way you get around the State prohibition against having a for-profit entity run a charter school.

The estimate is that most children in charter schools now are in for-profit schools. They don't represent the largest number of schools, but they seem to represent the largest number of students, because for-profit charter schools, perhaps not surprisingly, tend to be larger. They're not the mom-and-pop operation, the community-based operation, the teacher-empowering operation that was articulated at the birth of this reform in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

So, now we have not only marketing of products and services under the guise of providing curriculum material, support, encouragement, for schools, we also have, as I said, the marketing of schools themselves and the translation of education into a product. So, where are we going with all of this?

I think we are not going in any particular direction at all. I think we are going into a lot of directions at the same time. I think we are likely to see the spread of the for-profit school industry, not because it produces greater educational benefits, not because students learn more, not because they are better schools, but because the for-profit industry happens to fit very well with the deregulatory trajectory of American politics and the American political elite.

Edison Schools wouldn't be in Philadelphia if the citizens of Philadelphia had their say. That's just flat-out the case. Edison Schools is in Philadelphia because the Governor of Pennsylvania basically removed the Philadelphia public schools from local control and imposed Edison Schools, and other for-profit schools, on that district.

And when you look at the history of for-profit education in the United States, you see a whole series of very questionable sweetheart deals between influential political figures and the presence of for-profit firms. The person who wrote the Massachusetts charter school law founded a for-profit company, as an example.

The for-profit presence of Edison in California wouldn't be possible without the charitable contribution of the Gap Foundation. That's the Fischer family. The Walton family is very heavily involved -- not of Walton's Mountain but of Wal-Mart Stores, very heavily involved in promoting that.

So, we have an economic and a political elite that, for whatever reasons and whatever motives, is interested in promoting for-profit education. And this despite evidence that might undercut that kind of proposal and this despite considerable public opposition to the idea of for-profit schools.

That's not going to go away. I think there is a real chance, in the area of health and nutrition, that we will see in some states and, to a certain extent at the Federal level, we are going to see schools losing their ability to market these products in the schools, or at least see that kind of activity sharply curtailed. I think we're going to see professionally a shaming of administrative behavior that promotes this kind of activity.

I think it will become, if not illegal, it will become something that will be sanctioned professionally. Meaning you won't have superintendents bragging anymore that they managed to negotiate an exclusive soft drink agreement.

In the areas of other commercial activity, I think at some point citizens in some state -- and I don't know which one -- within the next decade or two, are going to get tired of doing this piecemeal, and they're going to simply position, and perhaps succeed in having passed, a law that says there will be no marketing to children in schools of any

sort. It's not a matter of local control. It's a matter of compelling state interest. You may not market to children in schools because it does not serve the public interest. It is harmful.

And I believe such a law, if passed, will meet constitutional muster. And I also further believe that one of the best and most enlightened things that you could do as educators to protect and to educate your children well would be to be the allies of this kind of initiative rather than the bystanders or the opponents of this kind of initiative.

It is very hard, I know, when the devil comes knocking with a few extra bucks and your budget is looking pretty bad, to just say no. But remember -- you know, The Devil and Daniel Webster? You know that story. Pretend you do even if you don't. When Mr. Scratch -- that's the devil -- confronts Daniel Webster, he says, oh, most people's souls I can fit in a little snuff box. But, Daniel Webster, for your soul I'd have to have a huge container. I couldn't fit your soul. If I could get you, I couldn't fit you in one of these little snuff boxes. It would be a big box.

So, the question I guess, metaphorically, for educators is, how big is the box your soul would fit in if Mr. Scratch came to your office and said, well, you know, I can get you a few extra bucks for this exclusive agreement, for this naming right, for letting us use these supplemental materials in your school, I can get you a few extra bucks? How big is your soul and what's he going to fit this in?

And remember, Mr. Scratch wasn't a very attractive figure in The Devil and Daniel Webster. But for those of you who believe in heaven and hell and believe in God and believe in the devil, remember that Satan, in Christian theology, was the most beautiful angel. It makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, if Satan were ugly, who would be tempted?

The offer is always going to look good. The question is whether or not you can resist the temptation and whether or not you can see what's really behind the offer, and whether or not you can imagine an American public school system that instead of moving toward a market model of human relations is moving toward a vision of a common school as a political ideal which empowers, strengthens and dignifies us all.

Thank you very much. I'll take questions.

[Applause]

ALEX MOLNAR: I will be happy to answer questions should you have any. I think you should probably stand at the microphone just so everyone can hear it, Paul.

QUESTION: Alex, Edison Corporation has lost something like $400 million, and it has been propped up recently by Merrill Lynch. They have been having a hard time keeping their stock above $1. Now, maybe this is a hopeful thing in some ways, because maybe it is demonstrating that there isn't enough fat to skim off in education to make it worth their

while to be in it. Would you react to the fact that Edison has been tanking economically for its whole history?

ALEX MOLNAR: Yes. To a certain extent, Edison is a failed business model rather than necessarily a harbinger of the collapse of this industry. I believe, for some time, that what you have, if the current political environment remains unchanged, you will have a number of relatively small players. And Edison Corporation, in the pantheon of American corporations, is quite a small one. It's a very little business.

What you have is a number of relatively small players. There will be a consolidation among those players. And they will transform their business model so that their primary earnings will not come necessarily from providing instruction to people, but by dominating an internal market in which they can sell peripherals such as computer programs, text materials, janitorial services, accounting services, and so on.

So, I think the future of privatization is to establish a large enough network of for-profit schools to create an internal market within those schools to market goods and services, both in and outside of those for-profit schools. I think that is where it is going.

And the only thing that I see deflecting that is a change in the political and regulatory environment within which they operate. If it were a just world, that would be changed right now. Because none of those factors -- I can sketch out a scenario in which that would make great business sense. The American health care industry is enormously profitable. It's just a dreadful industry that ought to be put out of business. Because it's wasteful and inefficient. It costs a ton of money. And it delivers no equity.

So, it is possible, in the United States, to create a tremendously profitable industry that is socially destructive. So, it is by no means the case that because the schools are failures in a larger education policy sense that they would necessarily go out of business.

QUESTION: My question was related to that one, and I'm just asking for your reaction. Because I don't believe that they're in it for the money -- it's easy to prove that you can't make money off of education -- but that they're in it for more of a commercial propaganda purpose, which won't even be served by selling janitorial supplies or anything. That they're in it for a totally different reason that they're not talking about that has to do with not only the selling of the things but with creating perhaps certain mindsets or viewpoints that are profitable for them later on as the kids grow up.

ALEX MOLNAR: Well, I think, in a general sense, the idea of for-profit education and education as a marketplace -- education represents, if you read the Wall Street analysts' reports, education represents an enormous multi-billion-dollar industry that they haven't figured out how to tap into. So, to a large extent, I think I would agree with part of what you're saying and maybe say it a little bit differently than you did. To a certain extent, this represents attempts and efforts to figure out a variety of different ways to create and profit from an educational market.

It hasn't been figured out yet. What would an educational market look like? Where would the boundaries be? How would the money be earned?

The business models are still very much in a state of flux. But the overall idea that there is a business model out there that will be profitable is very much current.

I think the businesses are going to have to be profitable in their own right. That's why I offered the idea of a large enough consolidation in order to create an internal market. From a venture capitalist point of view, the fact that a business loses money for five years is ordinary. That's not an extraordinary thing; that's an ordinary thing. Many new businesses, most new businesses, lose money initially.

So, the idea is whether or not this thing, this entity, can, over time, be built into a viable enterprise, what the potential risks are and what the potential benefits. And the people who invest in for-profit education and who are promoting it in a variety of different ways haven't settled that this is a failure just yet. So, yes, in the large sense, it promotes an ideology which is favorable to corporations and creates a kind of common sense about the world that they're comfortable with. And in a narrower sense, they are looking for a business model that works.

And you see all of the attendant problems associated with this when you mix corporate and public interest. The history of contemporary for-profit education is littered with examples of what appear to be collusion, double dealings, sweetheart contracts, conflicts of interest, and so on. It is a kind of shabby history really to this point.

QUESTION: This may be a little bit off topic, but I think it's appropriate to some of the things you're saying about the market's claims on education and corporate claims on education. And I was wondering if you would comment on a group that I think is very dangerous, the Business Roundtable and their publications affecting our assessment practices and the things that a lot of us as educators are opposed to in terms of standardized testing. I wonder if you would comment about their publication "Building Support for Tests that Count," and their claims on education and the influences that they have in determining education policy.

ALEX MOLNAR: In the United States, corporate executives have been, except for perhaps the last year and a half, most commonly referred to as visionaries. Around the 1960's, that generally referred to people on drugs. But in the 1980's, this became a term routinely applied to business executives who, through a variety of methods, made money, some of them quite honorable and aboveboard, some of them quite sleazy. But the word visionary is very often associated with business executives, to the point of craziness.

That's the larger kind of cultural/social background in which an organization like the Business Roundtable functions. So, these are folks who are accustomed to having access, access to politicians, access to policymakers. They are accustomed to being listened to. They have conversations over golf. They have conversations at brunches. They have

meetings. They have all kinds of informal and formal networks that communicate to them that they're important, that they're powerful, that they're wise.

I don't think the Business Roundtable is the only group that we might question in this regard. And they are businesspeople, some of whom have, I think, quite noble and altruistic ideas about how to reform public education. Many of them may have accepted the idea of testing as a way of bringing accountability. Because education is such a complex enterprise, it's so loosely coupled, that it is baffling to many corporate visionaries. Because they are accustomed to top-down management, in many respects. They're accustomed to giving an order and having that order followed. They're accustomed to five-year plans. In that respect, they're very much like Stalinist bureaucrats. They're accustomed to this sort of very rigid organization. And an institution like public education baffles them.

That being said, there is this altruistic part of testing. But there is also a fact that testing is about to become very big business. And it is also about to swallow curriculum and instruction. Which means that you have people more interested in weighing sheep than feeding them. Which is kind of a strange reversal, isn't it? It's kind of strange.

So, I was called, by way of example, or because I agree with you, and the feedback from this test could be disaggregated by race, by income, by all of the factors that the No Child Left Behind wants you to be able to disaggregate. In other words, it was tailored to the No Child Left Behind assessment requirements.

Well, I walked the reporter through this, because he thought, well, this is not a bad idea. And it sounds, gee, whiz, what a wonderful enabling technology for educators. Probably some of it is being sold here at ASCD.

So, I walked him through it. I said, now, let me understand this. The teacher gives a test once a week? Yes, that's right. And then they get this information back. Let's assume they get it instantaneously. They know who did what. They know which questions they missed. They know what race they were, what their family income was. They have all of this sheaf of information.

So, now they have four days before the next test, which is on a different subject. It's a different goal. So, I asked, what is a teacher to do with this sheaf of information? It's of absolutely no instructional value, because there is no time to, first of all, take in the information. Secondly, respond to the information in some instructionally valid way. And thirdly, find the time inside of the school day to implement the curriculum and instruction ideas that she or he had come up with, because the class is on this treadmill, this conveyer belt, headed for the next test.

So, I said, this is not an enabling technology. This is an imprisoning technology. This is a way of handcuffing teachers, of chaining them to a test, and making it virtually impossible for them to respond to the learning needs of their children. Talk about watering the fires of learning. It's dreadful.

So, what we have here to a very large degree with this national emphasis on standards and testing is, again, a situation in which a fairly large number of people can make a ton of money destroying curriculum and instruction programs all over the country. It sets up a terrible, terrible dynamic. And it is going to suck money out of school programs. It is going to drive people out of teaching. And it is going to, I think, produce results which are exactly the reverse of what the stated public objective is, which is to increase student learning.

I think more and more students are going to fall off this treadmill or be ground beneath it. There is already evidence that that is happening in places like Texas, for example.

Other questions?

QUESTION: I think you spent a good deal of time talking about health and diet. And on the surface, I was able to agree with some of those things. But I'm wondering about the actual practice of not having any commercialism in schools, where we provide, for instance, in the school lunch program, milk to our kids that is provided by some dairy that has a name. Or we could take it further, to our computers that we might buy from IBM.

ALEX MOLNAR: I'll answer that with a story. Some of you may recall a program promoted by IBM, called Write to Read. In my view, a kind of crummy program, actually. But anyway, a computer-based reading program. And I had a conversation 12 or so years ago with the person who at that time was the state superintendent of schools in Mississippi. Which is not a state with a lot of extra resources to spare for its schools. And a group of businesspeople -- I believe they were from California -- had created a group -- they were very enamored of Write to Read; for whatever reasons, they were very enamored of it -- and they had created a group which would provide essentially the computers to the schools free if they agreed to use Write to Read as their reading program.

And the superintendent of public instruction in Mississippi turned them down. And the reason that he turned them down, he explained to me, was because if on the evaluation of the program for its educational merits it was determined that Write to Read was the most effective program for them to use in teaching reading in Mississippi, he would accept such an offer. But if the reason for accepting the offer was because it was free, the computers were provided free, and you had to do this curriculum and instruction program with it, even though you judged it not necessarily to be the best program for your children, then he wasn't going to accept it.

So, it doesn't trouble me. All corporations that do business in the United States routinely identify themselves on their products. In the context of schools, what it means is how do we come to the decision that that computer is going to be in the school, that that milk carton is going to be in the refrigerator, and so on? And in the case of milk, it would be, is it nutritious, has it been competitively bid? You see what I mean? The decision is internal to the school based on a judgment of what best serves the interests of the children who attend that school.

And I think what has happened with so many of these commercial impacts of the schools, the overriding decision has not been made on the basis of the interests of children, as the superintendent of schools at that time in Mississippi said with regard to Write to Read, it has been made on the basis of, oh, well, it's free, oh, well, I can get a few bucks for this.

And so the curriculum and instruction decision, the student interest decision, gets put by the side and pushed to the background. And I'm saying that's wrong and we need to stop that.

QUESTION: I teach high school. And we recently did a study on propaganda and combined it with literature and some sort of social literature. We read Uncle Tom's Cabin and talked about propaganda techniques. And then we read The Jungle and Grapes of Wrath, and then read Fast-Food Nation, to talk about issues of labor and propaganda. And the kids organized a letter-writing campaign and are boycotting fast-food restaurants. And they're interested in learning and doing more, and I was wondering if you could recommend any media literacy resources or school commercialism resources that we could use.

ALEX MOLNAR: It just so happens...

QUESTION: Well, I noted those, but I was wondering if you could talk about any books or anything you could recommend.

ALEX MOLNAR: Well, sure. Fast-Food Nation is a darn good book. I have a list, but I'm also 57 and I have a terrible thing with names. Let me just say, if you go to that Web site, you'll find my e-mail address and I can give you a list of books. That's fairly easy to do.

I'm also a terrible presenter, in some ways, aren't I? I have this beautiful information behind me that tells you how to get to the information I've been talking about, and I haven't referred to it yet. And I know some of you have stayed only to find out what in the hell this overhead is actually about.

So, let me just tell you that the bulk of what I've been talking about and an awful lot of information related to what I've been talking about is contained on the Commercialism in Education Research Unit site at www.schoolcommercialism.org. I direct the Education Policy Studies laboratory and the Commercialism in Education Research Unit as well.

You will find, by the way, I think a number of things on that site that would be appropriate for high school-age kids. They would not have difficulty reading it, let me put it to you that way. But, oh, my goodness, there are just so many books.

Please, do e-mail me. I will respond.

Are there other questions?

[No response]

ALEX MOLNAR: Well, it looks as though the AV people are starting to bail out, so it must be towards the end. When they do calisthenics in the sound booth, you know that your time is almost up.

Without any further questions and hearing no objections, I declare this session at an end.

[Applause]

Alex Molnar

Alex Molnar is a Professor of Education Policy and Director of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University. EPSL houses five divisions: the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU); the Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA); the Education Policy Reports Project (EPRP); the Education Policy Studies Research Unit (EPRU); and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU).

Molnar has a B.A. in history, political science, and education; two masters degrees, one in history and one in social welfare; a specialist's certificate in educational administration; and a Ph.D. in urban education. From 1972 to August 2001, he was on the faculty of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he directed the Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation (CERAI) and the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education (CACE). Previously he taught social studies at a high school in the Chicago area.

From 1993 to 1995, Molnar served as chief of staff for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Urban Initiative, a project that resulted in the creation of Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program. The statewide SAGE program is designed to increase academic achievement of low-income children in grades K-3 by reducing class size, reforming the curriculum, providing professional development, and opening schools to morning and evening activities. Molnar was a principal investigator on the SAGE evaluation team from 1995 to 2001.

Molnar is a frequent presenter at professional and scholarly conferences and in public forums. He has served on the Board of Directors and the Urban Education Advisory Board of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. He is the editor or co-author of several books, including *Changing Problem Behavior in Schools* (Jossey-Bass, 1989), which is widely used by educators in the United States and has been translated into four languages. He has published numerous articles on social and educational policy and practice. In addition to scholarly and professional journals such as *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *Phi Delta Kappan* and *Educational Leadership*, Molnar's work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *New Republic*, and *Education Week*.

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Molnar is a nationally recognized expert on educational issues and often is cited in newspaper and magazine articles. He is frequently asked to discuss educational topics on radio and television programs such as National Public Radio's "Market Place," and "Talk of the Nation." Molnar has been featured on "60 Minutes," and has appeared on "The News Hour" and CNN reports, among many others.

For the past several years, Molnar has studied and written about commercial activities in the schools and about such market-based school reforms as private school vouchers, charter schools, and for-profit schools. His most recent books are *Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialization of America's Schools* (Westview/Harper Collins, 1996), *The Construction of Children's Character* (National Society for the Study of Education, 1997), *Vouchers, Class Size Reduction, and Student Achievement: Considering the Evidence* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 2000), and *School Reform Proposals: The Research Evidence* (Information Age Publishing, 2002).

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